INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN THE ERA OF INTIMIDATION: AN APPRAISAL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines international organizations as a framework of collective security with reference to League of Nations and argues that the failure of the League of Nations had two important dimensions: (1) The failure to provide adequate security guarantee for its members (like an alliance), thus encouraging more aggressive policies especially by the authoritarian states and leading to an arms race; (2) The failure of the League to achieve the disarmament goals it set out in the 1920s and 1930s, such as imposition of military spending constraints. Anchored on the theory of realism, it is indicated that the political and economic turmoil of the interwar years including the aggregate weakness of the League to enforce its covenant were adequately explored by Japan and Germany to further their expansionist tendencies. The analysis further show that, the failure of the League of Nations to properly address issues of threats to international peace and security suggests that, the weaknesses were implanted at its formative stage. Indeed, a careful understanding of the military rivalries, regime changes, and, ultimately, the outbreak of World War II point to the fact that the League failed to provide credible security guarantees before and during the interwar period.

Keywords: International Organizations; Threats; Collective Security; Interwar Years; Annexation

INTRODUCTION

In the rhetoric of contemporary international relations including the long-standing debate between isolationists and internationalists seems to have been rendered sterile and, to continue to adumbrate that no nation-state is an island, simply begs the question. It is in this persuasion that Aremu (2013) postulates that transnational interactions have grown in diversity, complexity and intensity between states and non-states actors, with increasing interdependence among nation-

states which has been accentuated by advancements in information and communication technology. However, even though the world has grown smaller in time and space dimensions, the international system remains segmented and bereft of centralized authority. Besides, the global system is a system comprising of independent nation-states which as a result of the unique attribute of sovereignty, claim the right to, at least in theory, act based on the dictates of their national interest. However, in the face of such competing and conflicting national goals and objectives, crisis is bound to ensue.

The need however to guarantee interest and minimize conflicts between nation-states in the international system, underscores the philosophy of a global government that is shared by some scholars and analysts (Niebuhr 1971). The urge meanwhile to prevent the international system from degenerating to the level of anarchy by regulating the behavior of nation-states constitutes the underlying principle of the emergence of international organizations (Aremu 2013). However, due to the complex nature of international relations, international organizations over the years became transformed to an unprecedented status. On the strength of the foregoing, international organizations have attracted a great deal of analyses from among scholars and practitioners of international politics, and as Claude (1984) rightly argued, "the problem of establishing a global government, is the problem of building strong international organizations."

According to Aremu (2013), defining international organization is an onerous task. This is because there is plethora of conceptions as there are scholars in the field. For instance, Jacobson (1984) defines international organization as "an international structure crated by agreement among two or more sovereignty states for the conduct of regular political interactions." Jacobson's conception like many others focused tremendously on the nation-state as the actor model in his explanation.

Plano and Olton (1975) have also defined international organizations as "a formal arrangement transcending national boundaries that provides for the establishment of institutional machinery to facilitate cooperation among states in the security, economic, social and related fields." This argument is also illustrative of the perversity of the state-centric bias as it failed to account for the rising significance of the non-state actors in international politics.

As products of the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and the industrial revolution, Cheever and Hailand (1954), defined international organizations as "any cooperative arrangement instituted among nation-states, usually by agreement to perform some mutually advantageous functions implemented through periodic meetings and staff activities." They are multilateral structures or arrangements which are more or less permanent, linking different nation-states, groups or associations based on different territorial areas (Asogwa 1999). They are established to serve as

devices by which attempts are made to solve either specific or general problems by means of debates, persuasion and occasionally coercion (Obi and Ozor 1999).

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Though for some centuries past, scholars involved, cross-cultural or national did not make serious attempts at scientific or systematic analysis. Most writings at these earlier times were centered primarily on diplomatic history and international law. The approach according to Ojo and Sesay (2002) was basically static and legalistic and concerned mainly with a blow-by-blow account of events between and among nation-states. The emphasis was on describing with much detail and accuracy as possible the particulars of specific incidents in history, either as an attempt made to theorize or as a quest for policy goals.

At this stage, the dominant ideology was idealism. The idealists believed that man is naturally good and that war is quite preventable. They felt that the best thing to do was that the world should come together to establish a supranational institution that would mediate in terms of conflicts. This found expression in the establishment of the League of Nations. However, the league's subsequent failure to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War brought about a high wave of pessimism that eroded the foundation of idealism (Obi and Ozor 2009).

This pessimism coupled with the emergence of the super powers, the development of nuclear weapons crystallized in the east-west ideological divided, facilitated the growth of political realism (Ojo and Sesay 2002). The major breakthrough for realism came with Hans J Morgenthau's sensational piece, titled Politics among Nations (1948). This was followed by the likes of R. Niebuhr, George Kennan, Henry Kissinger and Stephen Waltz inter alia. The realists contend that:

> … in states' pursuit of power, the centrality of military strength with that power, and the enduring inevitability of conflict in a world of multiple sovereignty. While not denying entirely a role of morality, law and diplomacy, realist laid emphasis on military might as an instrument of maintaining peace. They believed that the central mechanism for regulating conflict was the balance of power, through which undue strength of one state would be compensated for by increased strength or expanded alliance on the part of others. This was something inherent in the system but also capable of conscious promotion (Halliday 1994).

Political realism became the dominant and even the sole approach in the conduct of international relations. The reason for this according to Halliday (1994) was thus: that Political realism possessed a powerful and comprehensive explanation of international relations and conflict. It

accorded with common sense the terms in which international affairs were debated publicly. It had received a powerful, apparently incontrovertible affirmation from the events of the 1930s and their consequences.

Arising from the above therefore, it is argued that the collapse of the League of Nations as the first supranational international organizations within the praxis of this study was based on the realist and neo-realist perspectives of international relations which presuppose that the international political environment is anarchical. To that extent, it is argued that what international organization does is to shrink the gap of antagonism and increase the gains derived from mutual cooperation with the view of guaranteeing equality and harmonious relationship of all nation-states. However, where nation-states defect from cooperation with others, international organizations can reduce the pains for those who cooperate (Obi and Ozor 1999). Thus, political realism ensures that international organizations serve as devices for regulating the relationship of power in the international system. It also ensures that power is exercised within responsible limits and that the relatively powerless do not suffer exploitation without redress and dominance without protest.

On this score, Archer (1983) argues that every international organization must have some irreducible characteristics which are broadly categorized into three. First, it must have a membership which should consist of two or more sovereign states. Second, every international organization pursues the common interests of its members as espoused its aims and objectives clearly spelt out in its constitution or charter. Third, Archer contends that an international organization should have its own formal continuous structural framework established by a treaty, agreement or constitutive act to which all member-states consent to.

Notwithstanding the various conceptions, Fatai Aremu (2013) submits that there seem to be a confluence of ideological underpinning on the existence of international organizations when its membership and/or scope of operation transcends beyond national frontiers. Therefore, a comprehensive and holistic definition must be one that not only acknowledges the traditional nation-state-as-actor praxis but also take cognizance of the contemporary potency of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). In other word, scholars have moved away from the structuralists conception of international organizations, and to that extent, international organizations cannot only be explained in terms of formal structural model.

Conceptualizing international organizations from a processual perspective, Bilgrami (1977) sees international organizations as "a process of organizing the growing complexity of international relations" and stresses the important dichotomy between international organization as a process on one hand, and international organization as the structural/institutional end product of the

process on the other hand. For Bilgrami, the structural/institutional frameworks of international organizations are the expressions of and the significant factor in contemporary international political affairs.

ETYMOLOGY OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Several attempts at explaining the origins of international organizations have remained inconclusive. It has become even more difficult when an attempt is made at dating its origins (Aremu 2013). It might be safe therefore, to agree with Hodges (1978) that the origin of international organizations is akin to the origins of the modern nation-state itself. Essentially, following every major European conflict since the celebrated Westphalian peace system which laid the foundation for the modern nation-state, was the argument that peace can be secured only through cooperation of existing nation-states (Aremu 2013). But prior to this period, evidence abound on the existence of certain forms in international organizations in the classical and medieval periods (LeRoy 1995).

At about 1600, much of the known world was united under the Holy Roman Empire and later the Roman Catholic Church. The 'Thirty Years War' and the Treaty of Westphalia which ended it established another order on Europe that moderated the peace for subsequent decades. The Treaty led to the increasing realization of the need for cooperation to prevent war and enhance welfare; and greater communication and commerce underscored the rising need for the significance of international organizations (Aremu 2013). The French Revolution (1789) and the Napoleonic wars destroyed the relative peace engendered by the Westphalian system. However, it was the Congress of Vienna (1815) which ended the Napoleonic wars that guaranteed another era of peace in Europe.

The experiences of the years that followed the Congress of Vienna established the Concert of Europe which dominated international relations with informal pattern of conferences, consultations and occasional concerted actions. The resultant Concert of Europe did not assume the character of a standing political organization, but a loose pattern that functioned until the First World War as a framework for a system of occasional great powers conferences which lent some substance to the idea that the European nation-states constituted an organized bloc. Basically, the Concert of Europe became the framework for international relations in post-Napoleonic Europe (Bilgrami 1977; Aremu 2013).

Indeed, the first modern international organization according to Kegley and Wittkopf (1989) was the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine established by the Congress of Vienna. The Rosicrucian Order which was established in 1649 on the other hand, is seen to have fitted in the contemporary definition of international non-governmental organization (INGO). It is very

important to note that the Concert of Europe was broadened by the Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907, which admitted small states as well as great powers and served as an experimental template for collective political discussions (Obi &Ozor 2009).By and large, the formation of the Concert of Europe was a major turning point in the search for global peace and evolution of international organizations.

The Concert of Europe represented an attempt by great powers to guarantee peace and order in Europe through the mechanism of collective security. It was a natural response to the challenges posed by the increasing international commerce and communication occasioned by the industrial revolution. But the concert system and the peace it engendered collapsed like a pack of cards with the outbreak of the First World War, which afterwards, led to the formation of the League of Nations as another mechanism for the maintenance peace and order in Europe. According to Obi and Ozor (2009), the Quadruple Alliance which became a Quintuple Alliance in 1818 with the inclusion of France, marked a significant landmark in the historical evolution of international organizations for several reasons. First, the alliance, though forged on the anvil of war was continued after hostilities to enforce peace. Second, periodic conferences were instituted when the great powers agreed to renew their meetings at fixed intervals. Finally and despite the suspicions of the smaller powers, it was generally agreed that the maintenance of peace depended to a large extent on great powers collaboration (Cheever and Hailand 1954). These notions were carried over into the League of Nations.

THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES AND WORLD ORDER

The League of Nations was formed in 1919 at a peace conference in France, when the Treaty of Versailles was signed by the victors of the First World War. Its major instrument, the Covenant, had as its cardinal object, the prevention of war and promotion of international peace and cooperation, a guarantee of the sovereignty and independence of member-states and sanctions (LeRoy 1995). In essence, it was left to each member-state to conclude whether a breach of the covenant of the League had taken place or not; and in the last resort whether or not to apply sanctions. This system worked with regard to certain relatively minor conflicts in the Balkans and Latin America, but failed where European powers or Japan were directly involved. The German, Italian and Japanese aggressions in the 1930s, and the Russian invasion of Finland in the Winter War, evoked little meaningful response from the League (Obi &Ozor 2009).

The League consisted of three main organs, namely; the Assembly, the Council and the Secretariat. The Assembly is composed of representatives of member-states and met annually, the Council, a semi-executive body, consisted of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers a number of non-permanent members, and reached its decisions unanimously; while, the

Secretariat functioned as an international civil service. Perhaps, next in importance were the Permanent Court of international Justice, the International Labor Organization, and the Technical Organizations (Obi and Ozor 2009).

It is important to state at this juncture that in spite of short lived existence of the League of Nations, it recorded some significant successes that survived even after its demise. For instance, the statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice was completed in December 1920. By the start of the Second World War, fifty-one nation-states had become member-states of the Court. For a period of about twenty years, until the interruption of the Second World War the court functioned with surprising success. According to Hudson (1944: 47), the court tried sixty-five cases and handed down thirty-two judgments, twenty-seven advisory opinions, and several hundred orders. Although the International Labor Organization was regarded as one of the main organs of the League, it had and still has a large measure of autonomy. In 1940, it moved its headquarters to Montreal, and it continued to function to the extent that it became a specialized agency of the United Nations.

The League structure also contained the Technical, Economic and Financial, Communication, Transit and Health organizations, each had its standing committees and held general conferences from time to time (Potter 1935). In fact, the League made a conscious effort for the first time to "create a systematic structural pattern for the conduct of international relations" (Archer 1983: 35). This was particularly noticeable in the 1920s when it provided a forum for regular meetings between the representatives of member-states and moderated the discussions on threats to peace and international order. The League was also involved with economic and social matters. In this wise, it "provided valuable coordination for efforts that had previously been disparate and also provided the machinery through which problems could be eventually tackled on a cross-national basis" (Claude 1964:35).In the area of conflict resolution, the League's covenants provided a framework for parties to reach a possible resolution by way of negotiation, arbitration, diplomacy and conciliation.

Nevertheless, the League and indeed the international system soon faced the onerous task of forging harmony and ensuring peace in a world that was characterized by the emergence of maniacal leadership with authoritarian appeals and out to intimidate and subdue their victims. Among the 'charismatic' despots were Adolf Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini of Italy and Franco of Spain (Aremu 2013). In fact, Mussolini invasion of feudal and decadent Ethiopia could be considered as the early sign of the decline of the League. But some scholars believe that the seed for the dissolution of the League was sown in 1919 with the United States Senate's rejection vote of the Treaty in its entirety, in spite of the fact that it was the United States president Woodrow Wilson who spearheaded the formation of the League, (Chronicle of the Twentieth

Century 1988). This tremendously weakened the organization's capacity to respond to critical issues of global concern.

Another reason for the collapse of the League was the awful conditions of the armistice on Germany. Despite Germany's loss of all its colonial possessions of some of its territories such as Alsace and Lorraine to the allies, Germany was asked to pay more than 200 Billion Gold Marks (about £10 Billion) as war indemnity. In addition, an annual 12.5 percent tax was imposed on German exports (Aremu 2013: 116). Indeed, the post-war recession and other socio-economic problems worsened the living conditions of an average German citizen, thereby preparing a conducive environment for the emergence of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi ideology with a racial appeal which he used to win over the vast majority of the German population.

Upon assuming power as the Chancellor of the German Reich having won the plebiscite 1933, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League and openly condemned and contravened the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. In spite of the appeasement policy towards Germany, the Nazi invaded the Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and France (Bennett 1988). At the Nuremberg Annual Rally in 1937, he gave justification for his actions indicating that Germany needed a greater 'living space' (Lebenscraum). Hitler submitted thus, "without colonies, Germany's space is too small to guarantee that our people can be fed safely and continuously. The attitude of other powers to our demand is simply incomprehensible" (Chronicle of the 20th Century 1988:338).

From the foregoing therefore, the drive for collective security had taken the League from one qualified commitment to another each reflecting on the adequacy of the other and all lacking visible means of enforcement. Despite increasing collaboration, the United States remained outside the League; and the resignation of Japan, Italy and Germany became very effective in 1935 (Myers 1935: 288). Disarmament efforts came to a halt, and the great powers began a race for naval strength, with all the Versailles Treaty limitations abandoned. Reparation was already a dead matter, and so was the restriction on German rearmament, a clear violation of the League's covenants (Obi and Ozor 2009: 185).

Thus, the League stood impotently if not silently at the time Japan invaded Manchuria and laid the plans for the conquest of China in totality. In fact, this emanates from the weaknesses that were contained in the League's framework and the foreign policy standpoints of the members that made it impossible for the system to work. The real test of the covenants first came with the surprising Japanese aggression in Manchuria. This turned out to be quite a shock for the League members, since Japan, a permanent member of the Council, had been conciliatory in its foreign policy in the 1920s, even during the naval disarmament conference of 1930 (Eloranta 2005:12).

Indeed, the long slide into war in Manchuria began on September 18, 1931, when local Japanese army attacked the city of Mukden without the knowledge and the wishes of the government in Tokyo. The government was forced to follow the military's lead in the matter, and the incident developed into an international conflict as the Japanese made considerable headway against the inferior Chinese forces (Eloranta 2005). This prompted extensive debate in the Council, yet it was not willing to put heavy pressure against Japan.

Further Japanese military action in Shanghai on January 28, 1932, finally triggered a more unitary collective response, which, despite being quite cautious, got Japanese troops out of Shanghai. When a special report condemning Japan was approved on February 24, 1933, the Japanese delegation walked out of the Assembly. Japan announced her formal withdrawal from the League on March 27, 1933 (Scott 1978: 208-229). The "Manchurian Incident" was just the first of many deadly misfortunes and setbacks the League was to grapple with. But then, the Soviet Union's joining of the League in 1934 at first provided a signal of hope for peace. Hitler's ascendancy to power in 1933 and his revisionist ideas soon came to the fore in European politics. Germany's withdrawal from the League and its fevered rearmament from 1935 onwards certainly cast doubts on the League's capability and Europe's future. Equally too, the process of "peaceful" conquests started by the remilitarization of Rhineland in March 1936, leading up to the Second World War, were certainly among the death blows to the League's credibility (Murray 1984; Kennedy 1989; Northedge 1986).

Yet, inability of the League to halt Italian aggression in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935-1936 turned out to be its most decisive failure. Mussolini, in essence, was able to achieve his illicit conquest despite the protestations of the other European powers. Especially the British, who initially were the prominent force behind them, were against the continuation of the sanctions put in place under Article (16) initially, and thus even the sanctions were removed in July 1936. This merely acknowledged the prevailing situation: the Great Powers were not ready to initiate aggression against Italy due to this conflict, and that Mussolini's victory in Abyssinia had already been sealed months before. To many revisionists, especially Hitler, this meant that the League was truly unable to stand in the way of the redrawing of the political map of Europe and the destruction of the status quo created at Versailles (Northedge 1986; Eloranta 2005: 14).

Moreover, the American isolationism, however inadequate as the term may be, left the European and even the "world" power relations in the hands of Great Britain and France. They were reluctant leaders in their own right, with their own interests displayed in their actions for example in the League's functions. Germany and Russia had been defeated in the First World War, thus leaving room for these traditional Great Powers to re-emerge in European politics (Papp 1988: 360). There were obvious disagreements in the goals valued by the British and the

French. The British, like the Americans, were less and less interested in the goal that France valued the most: keeping Germany in check. Additionally, too, Great Britain was more pre-occupied by extra-European problems, namely keeping the vast Empire from disintegrating. At the beginning of the 1930s France seemed to be the leading nation in the European political landscape. Its economic performance in the 1930s, however, proved to be poor in comparison with the other European Great Powers (Kennedy 1989, 357-375). Thus, the European stage created a sort of a "power vacuum" during the 1930s, which invited hegemonic competition for leadership. Hence, Hitler could no longer be ignored, and had begun the marshalling of Germany's strength to execute the provisions of Mein Kampf which underground shackled Austria (Myers 1935).

For the records, in spite of the League's sanctions approval against Italy in a fifty-one states vote, their effective implementation depended on the support of Britain and France, whose attitudes were decisive. Both of them, but especially France, wanted to be able to count on Italian support against possible aggression by Hitler. Indeed, British retreat and French desperation led to the infamous Hoare-Lavani Pact (1935). The plan that the two foreign ministers agreed to delay oil sanctions, to avoid military sanctions and to appease Mussolini by giving him two-third of Ethiopia on one hand (Obi and Ozor 2009).

On the other hand, the Manchuria issue had dealt a decisive blow on the League. Checking Japan as a firth order power was one thing. Japan operated far from the bases of the other great powers, and Russia was not then a member of the League. Therefore, to check Italy as a third rank power was another problem, as Italy was more vulnerable. More so, while the United States outside the League discouraged the imposition of sanctions by her uncertain attitude and so must bear some guilt; the British and French anxiety to avoid war with Italy at almost any cost prove to be a decisive factor (Haines and Hoffman 1943: 385). From the blow of the Ethiopian war, the League never recovered.

Finally, the League virtually had no hand in the Spanish war. The loyalists made several appeals to it, but it did nothing beyond giving moral support to the non-intervention formula and later helped to supervise the withdrawal of foreign volunteers. The League played no significant part in the events leading to the surrender at Munich in 1938, and to the outbreak of the Second World War. Indeed, it maintained a shadowy existence until 1945, when it was formally dissolved.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis indicates that the League of Nations ultimately fail to achieve widespread disarmament which was its most fundamental goal after the First World War. The absence of the

United States from the League, failure of the League to resolve the inherent problems between Great Powers, failure in the handling of the disarmament process and the inability of the League to stop Japan, Germany and Italian imperial ambitions are all pointed as the reasons for the collapse of the League as well as the eruption of the Second World War. In fact, the international environment was not very conducive for breakthroughs in the disarmament sphere due to the uncertain political and economic turmoil (which lacked the basis for international cooperation), the so-called weak states were not as constructive in the negotiations as is often depicted, and domestic economic interest groups were often hostile to any significant arms production and trade limitations. Thus, the member states tended to pursue their own interests, which were not the same for each state nor were the means that they were ready to use to achieve their aims were in tandem with international conventions.

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